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ADDRESS BY THE HONORABLE GEORGE F. KENNAN BEFORE THE MID-WINTER DINNER MEETING OF THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE BAR ASSOCIATION AT THE CASEY HOTEL, SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA, FRIDAY, JANUARY 16, 1953, AT 9:00 P.M., E.S.T.

Gentlemen:

I am, as you know, now a Pennsylvanian-by-adoption, of some ten years standing. Yet the circumstances of my life and work have made it hard, during these years, either to see as much of my neighbors in the State as I would have liked, or to contribute in any way to its public life and activities. This occasion gives me an opportunity to do both of these things, in a small way, and I am grateful to you for it.

I know that what you will wish to hear me speak about tonight is the subject with which my name has been most commonly connected -- the subject of Soviet-American relations. This is perhaps a good time to speak of this subject. The country stands just now at the end of one epoch and the beginning of another in its foreign relations. The coming period is going to place upon us demands of a crucial nature, and precisely in the formulation of policy toward those men who are the leaders of both the Soviet Union and the world communist movement. The fact that I have been concerned with Soviet affairs, in one official capacity or another, over most of the past twenty-five years naturally leaves me with thoughts on these matters which I feel the need to share, from time to time, with other people.

For these reasons I would like tonight to look back a bit on this problem of Soviet-American relations and to outline to you what I feel to be some of the principles by which we might most usefully be guided when we approach it.

The problem, as I am sure most people in our country understand, is not one of our relations with the Russian people or the other peoples of the Soviet Union. The Russian people, with whom it has been my privilege to come more closely into contact, are a great people -- differing from ourselves, to be sure, in many ways, embracing, like every other great people, light and dark sides to their national character -- but a people full of feeling and humanity, affected by and large by the same impulses that animate people and give life its meaning in this or any other normal country. Most of them, I am sure, have the same sort of inner awareness we do of their affinity with the rest of mankind -- an awareness of the fact that in the long run we human beings must learn to be charitable with one another and to stand together or face the suicidal destruction of our entire civilization.

But all this has little to do with the problem of Soviet-American relations. The common people in the Soviet Union, as you know, are barred off from the outside world by a system of barriers and restrictions as humiliating as any form of restraint that has ever been placed on a great people -- by that immense anachronism we refer to as the Iron Curtain. Our problem is not with these common people but with the men who have contrived to command their obedience -- the Soviet leaders.

What is really the source of the terrible differences that have divided us and continue to divide us from these men? This is a question which all of us who have been concerned with Soviet affairs have had to ask ourselves day after day

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over the course of these many years. Whenever you get great human differences, it is usually safe to conclude that there has been fault on both sides. Surely, to some extent, that has been true here. I am prepared to admit that we have made mistakes here and there over the course of the years, in our relations with the Soviet Union. But we have been in existence as a country for one hundred and seventy-five years. Other governments have found it possible to get along with us. And I cannot help but conclude that the deepest source of the difficulty has not lain with those human foibles we Americans undoubtedly have, which have a tendency to pop up in all our behavior as a nation, but in something quite special on the other side, something which distinguishes the Soviet regime from any other modern political system I have known.

I am speaking here of the ideological preconceptions by which the Soviet leaders were originally motivated, and of the way in which the exercise of absolute power in Russia has tended to build itself around these preconceptions and to become dependent on them.

When the Russian communists seized power in St. Petersburg in the fall of 1917 they were already animated by a preconceived hostility to our form of government, our social order, and our deepest beliefs. And they were not content to reject these things for themselves; they insisted that it was part of their duty in life to desire, and to abet, the destruction of these things in our country.

This -- when you stop to think of it -- was a very strange state of affairs. These Russian communists, for the most part, had never been in our country. They had only the dimmest notions of its real character. They had suffered no injury from us. The Russian revolutionary movement, in which they had their political origin, had enjoyed warm sympathy among the American public for fifty years prior to the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917.

And yet these men came to power openly contemptuous of practically all the things that Americans held in honor and respect, breathing defiance and hatred toward almost everything that lay at the foundation of our society, decrying the usefulness of our social and economic system, and calling on Americans, in no uncertain terms, to rise up and overthrow this system by violent action.

Having first decided to regard us as a society founded on evil and doomed principles, it was only a step, of course, to regarding us, and representing us to the Soviet peoples, as an full-fledged enemy. I suspect that this had its own peculiar domestic uses. When one is unable to govern a society any way but dictatorially, with the suppression of all normal human liberties and through the agency of a vast apparatus of oppression, it is always convenient to justify and rationalize these conditions by pointing to a foreign danger. And if this danger does not really exist, then it is natural to create a boogey-man to represent it. In this way a set of doctrinaire preconceptions about the outside world, ourselves included, became anchored in the internal relationships of power in the Soviet Union and took its place among the very foundation stones of that political system.

Once this had happened, it made little difference what our Government might do, from the standpoint of the manner in which its actions would be received and interpreted at the other end. Some people will tell you that it was the American intervention in Russia in 1918 and 1919, or other acts of American policy in that early period, which created Soviet hostility to ourselves. That is not correct. I am not defending all the things we did at that time. Some may have been wise, others not. But I can tell you that whatever we might have done -- and this has been the case ever since -- it would have been misinterpreted by these men to our own disadvantage, and exploited in order to substantiate the thesis that the outside world was hostile and menacing and not to be trusted.

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It was this quest for absolute power, then, and the need for preconceptions by which to rationalize it, that have stood at the heart of our difficulties. It is against this background that the Soviet leaders have consistently misrepresented and vilified our society all these years before the eyes of the Soviet peoples and peoples elsewhere in the world. It is against this background that they have continued, over thirty-five years, to give administrative guidance and comfort and encouragement to groups in our country desirous of subverting the very purposes to which our national life has been dedicated. It is against this background that one American representative after another who has gone to Moscow with decent and conciliatory purpose has been treated in a manner calculated to make him feel that he is regarded a sinister figure and presumed capable of the most criminal undertakings. My own recent experience was unusual in form, but not in content.

Gentlemen, I have been the witness of effort after effort on the part of individual Americans and other foreigners, private individuals as well as government officials, to break down this morbid misanthropy, to demonstrate to the Soviet leaders that we had no evil designs, to persuade them that we wanted nothing else but to live in peace and amity with them. Invariably these efforts were unsuccessful. They were received with sneers and misrepresentation, or were cynically exploited. If any one thing is clear about the Soviet Union, it is that this attitude on the part of its leaders is a subjective one, not a reaction to outside reality. It rests on their necessities, not ours. It is impervious to any rational or generous appeal. With the course of time, I am confident, it will wear away and yield to something more healthy, because Providence has its way of punishing those who persist long and willfully in ignoring great realities. Perhaps by our actions — never by our words — we will be able to hasten its disappearance. But for all these years we have had to accept it and to deal with it as an existing fact. And we still do today.

In that lies our problem. It is a problem wholly new to our experience. What do you do with people like this, who are set against you by everything they stand for and everything they have committed themselves to? What is the correct reaction of a well-intentioned and reasonable nation when confronted with preconceived, implacable malice and hostility, borne by people who have committed themselves profoundly to such an attitude, who are without ears for the words of others, who are capable of hearing only the sound of their own voices?

The tendency of people in this country has often been to seek simple, one-time answers to this tremendous question.

There have been people, for example, who — incensed and irritated by this situation — have professed to see in it valid cause for war, and have considered a resort to arms the most suitable means of dealing with it. It is a source of deep personal comfort to me that these people have remained a small and ineffectual minority within the body of our society, and that our Government has consistently rejected this possibility as a deliberate course of American policy. It is true that we owe the Soviet leaders nothing. It is true that our actions, so far as the are concerned, need be guided only by what we find useful to our own security and to the stability and health of the international environment in which we have to live. But war, as our people have correctly recognized, is far more than a means to an end; modern war is a catastrophe in its own right, for all concerned. It affects peoples as terribly as it affects rulers; sometimes more so. And military victory alone is not apt to be as decisive as many people think. The great and primary task of political action is not to destroy men but to influence their attitudes and their behavior. Military victory cannot, therefore, be looked to as a substitute for wise and patient political action, directed toward the minds of men.

Of course, we must stand ready to use the sword, as we are now using it in Korea, when people confront us with alternatives which are even more dangerous and

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unfortunate. But I hope that we will always continue to think of it as something to be used only with the greatest reluctance and under the heaviest sort of provocation, and to reject it as our preferred concept of how to deal with all the malice and trouble the Soviet leaders have brought to our door.

Another concept people have entertained as to how to deal with Soviet power is to ignore it and to have as little as possible to do with it. This was, in effect, the policy followed for the first seventeen years after the Russian revolution.

On principle, I am a partisan of this approach wherever it is practically feasible. It combines dignity with moderation. It spares us having to bring injury to innocent by-standers. Of all the attitudes we could take, it is the least susceptible to misrepresentation and unscrupulous exploitation. But we must face the fact that the outcome of World War II left us seriously involved with the Soviet Government in a number of questions vital to the future intactness of our civilization. Neither party can now extract itself from the unhappy intimacy this involves. Just as the Soviet Union and the United States are both today too great to hope to destroy each other except at exorbitant mutual cost so they are also too great to ignore each other with impunity. The interests of world peace require that they communicate with each other -- at least in a certain limited number of questions. And neither can be insensible to the indirect effects of what the other does.

Still other people have hoped from time to time to break down the hostility of the men in the Kremlin by showing them kindness and confidence. This thought, too, has dominated our policy for considerable periods. It is probably well that it has been tried; because its rejection should rest, as it does today, only on the evidence of a fair and patient trial, not on the say-so of a few experts who were skeptical about it from the beginning. But the fact is, that, as I have already stated, it has been tried, and has failed signally. We can have no illusions about it today.

Finally, there are those who point to what they believe to be the unhappiness of the various peoples under Soviet rule, and advocate a policy which, placing our hopes on the possibility of internal disintegration of Soviet power, would make it the purpose of governmental action to promote such disintegration.

Gentlemen, it is right that individual Americans should stand for their beliefs and do what they can to make them understood and respected elsewhere. I do not underrate the competitive power of freedom in the struggle of political ideas. I hope it will always be on our side. I think time and circumstances will tend to prove its strength. I think the arts of totalitarian despotism will prove in the end to be self-destructive.

But I would be extremely careful of doing anything at the governmental level that purports to affect directly the governmental system in another country, no matter what the provocation may seem. It is not consistent with our international obligations. It is not consistent with a common membership with other countries in the United Nations. It is not consistent with the maintenance of formal diplomatic relations with another country. It is replete with possibilities for misunderstanding and bitterness. To the extent it might be successful, it would involve us in heavy responsibilities. Finally the prospects for success would be very small indeed; since the problem of civil obedience is not a great problem to the modern police dictatorship.

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Let us by all means take pride in our institutions and our political ideas. Let us do all we can to commend them by their successful application in our own country. Let us certainly not make ourselves the allies and guarantors of despotism anywhere. But beyond that, let us not commit ourselves. It was a wise American statesman, John Quincy Adams, who once said: ...America "goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own. She will recommend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and the benignant sympathy of her example. She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standards of freedom. The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force."

You will see, then, that I find myself obliged to reject, one after another, each of these obvious and simple approaches, with which people have tended to react to this Soviet challenge. The difficulty of the problem we are talking about tonight lies precisely in the fact that it is so complex and so diffuse in its implications, and is not susceptible to treatment by any single and simple device. Our responses to it have to be as variegated as the forms it takes and the phases of our life that it affects.

These responses have to be related, in each case, to the circumstances and demands of the moment. In this way they constitute, of course, the chain of decisions which go to make up what we call policy. About such matters -- that is, decisions as applied to specific situations -- it is not my intention to speak tonight. But I do feel that there are certain general principles by which it is wise to abide in arriving at all these decisions. And I would like to conclude these remarks by telling you what I think some of the most important of these principles are.

The first is simply this: in your dealings with international communism, above all, be strong. But when I say "be strong," I mean be strong on principle, not just as a reaction to passing phenomena on the international scene. Be strong not just because there is a war on at this moment in Korea, or because you may have convinced yourself that a peak of military danger is going to occur at some particular time in the future. Be strong in order that your word may be respected, in order that your friends may feel confidence in you, in order that there may be no needless and tragic misunderstandings. Be strong with the intention of remaining strong for a good, long time -- for, say, at least one or two decades -- regardless of the intervening fluctuations on the international scene.

Secondly, be cool-headed and deliberate. Our Soviet adversaries are men of deep experience, great consistency of purpose, and great flexibility of tactics. The traditions of their movement forbid them to fail to take advantage of any openings for promoting the interests of that movement. They are inhibited from indulging generally in those amenities of social intercourse and personal contact which have usually marked the process of diplomacy and played -- I think -- a most useful role as guardians against needless misunderstanding and cushions for absorbing the shock of conflicts of interest. Any international relationship that lacks these cushions is unavoidably precarious and delicate. At the same time, I need not point out to you that a tremendous amount depends, for ourselves and for people all over the world, on the handling and course of Soviet-American relations. For all these reasons I would say that this is a time for the greatest circumspection and coolness of judgment in this area. There is no field of governmental activity in which such things as sensationalism, emotionalism, the striking of heroic attitudes, and demagoguery of all sorts are less in place. If the people of this country wish their relations with the Government of the Soviet Union to proceed safely and successfully, avoiding the extremes of catastrophe or foolish appeasement, they will see to it that these matters are committed to the care of mature and responsible people and will permit those people to have the indispensable advantages of public confidence and privacy of decision. This area is no place for impulsiveness, no place for self-seeking, no place for irresponsible experiments, and no place for the spot-light of sensationalism.

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Thirdly, while cultivating strength, remain prepared at all times to negotiate where negotiation is required. Please do not misunderstand me. I do not believe in the possibility of any sudden and global solutions by negotiation. The great ethical and philosophical differences which separate us from the Soviets are not ones that can be talked out of existence at the present time. But there are specific international situations in which useful ends can be served by practical arrangement to which both sides agree, even though the readiness to agree may be for differing and conflicting aims. We must see to it that in each of these cases we show ourselves prepared to adjust differences, to the extent this can be done without compromising basic issues. For this reason it is important that we should have, with respect to each of these situations, a clear and realistic position, and should see to it that this position is known to, and understood by, the world public. We have all learned that negotiation from weakness is worse than futile; but many of us have still to learn that strength is not a substitute for negotiation, and that it is idle to press your adversary against a closed door. After all, what we want to accomplish in the first instance with our Soviet adversary, as I see it, is to bring him to a more reasonable and responsible attitude toward his world obligations and to prove to him that it would be the part of prudence on his part to moderate his behavior on the international plane. For this, channels must be left open into which he can move, as and when a clearer appreciation of realities comes upon him. This is all the more necessary from the standpoint of our relations with our allies and other associates among the peace-loving nations. It is essential, if we are to retain their confidence and support, that they be convinced that our policies are directed toward the gradual improvement of world conditions, not toward the holocaust of another war.

This brings me to the fourth principle: guard your unity, in every respect. The importance of this cannot be over-rated. Our communist adversaries know that the latent aggregate strength of the free world outclasses at this juncture, and will long continue to exceed, the strength of the world they command. The central emphasis of their policy therefore lies not in the prospect of a head-on confrontation but in the hope of weakening and dissipating the strength of the free world through promoting disunity within its ranks. I reiterate: the basis of their attack on us is the development and exploitation of divisions among us. Correspondingly, the first element of our defense should logically be the cultivation of unity within our own ranks.

This duty arises on two planes. The first of these is the international. There is no task of American foreign policy more important than the cultivation of sound relationships with our principal associates in the non-communist world. Sound relationships, as I see them, are ones founded not on charity nor on propaganda nor on sentimentality nor on anything that smacks of self-righteousness or patronizing. They are relationships founded on mutual respect and confidence, and on an enlightened understanding of the area in which interests of two countries are genuinely identical. Such relationships can be achieved. But I am afraid that in many cases today it would require a readiness on our part to make significant modifications in national behavior, and not just in that part of national behavior which we Americans traditionally think of as foreign policy. It seems to me, for example, that many of the vestiges of protectionism still present in our national life are inconsistent with the sort of international relationships we require at this juncture, and ill become a nation of our economic strength and position of world responsibility.

The second plane on which unity must be cultivated is the domestic one. But surely, if we are to have the right kind of domestic unity, then there must be a marked change in the tone and temper of public life over what it has been in the past period, and particularly in the treatment of these questions of civic loyalty that are so closely bound up with the communist problem.

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This is a painful and delicate subject. I have no doubt that anything I say about it will be held against me by impassioned elements in our press and public. But it is too important to pass by in any discussion of the problems I am talking about tonight.

I ask you to bear in mind that I am looking at this from the standpoint of one who has long seen these matters from the Moscow end. As much as twenty years ago some of us who were concerned with Soviet affairs at posts abroad began pointing to the evidences of communist exploitation of our civic liberties, and urging vigorous action to keep it under control. I think it fair to say that we were the pioneers in the exploration of this problem. For our pains we had the experience of being potted at from the left for many years, and accused of being "a clique of anti-Soviet reactionaries in the State Department." What we were alarmed about in those days was of course the possibility that the dimensions of the problem of communist penetration might be under-estimated and real damage be done to our public policy by lack of vigilance in this field.

Today I must say, again looking at it from the standpoint of one who has been on the Moscow firing line, that my greatest worry has been just the opposite, namely: that through exaggerating the dimensions of this danger, and failing to put it into proper perspective with the other problems before us, we may be creating weaknesses in our society greater than anything communist penetration itself ever was likely to achieve.

Please do not misunderstand me. At various times there has undoubtedly been some communist penetration into our public life, both within and without government. That is a serious and dangerous thing. My purpose here is not to belittle this problem, but rather to urge that we give it its due weight, neither more nor less, and that we guard against the damage that can be done to our own society if it is handled rashly or unwisely.

There has been much discussion about communist penetration in our government. But people seldom attempt to appraise the actual damage done thereby to our public policy. I have been fairly close to the policy-making processes in Washington for the past six years. With many of the decisions I have been personally in accord; with others, not. But I cannot recall a single major decision of foreign policy during that period which communist influence could have had any appreciable part in determining. If, therefore, I were to be asked what part communist penetration had played in creating our difficulties and perplexities of today in the field of foreign affairs, I would have to say that -- as far as these past years are concerned -- that part has been negligible, and I am sure it is negligible today.

On the other hand, I have seen serious damage done in these recent years to public confidence and to governmental morale by the mishandling of our own measures to counter precisely this problem of communist penetration. Such damage has been done by the public discussion of things that should have been handled quietly and privately. It has been done by the inability of many people to distinguish between questions of loyalty and questions of opinion. It has been done by the workings of hastily devised and not fully appropriate procedures for testing and establishing the reliability of public servants. Finally, such damage has been done by the failure of many people to realize that what is important from the standpoint of personal loyalty is not the dusty record of actions committed ten to twenty years ago and now proven by hindsight to have been errors, but the picture of the living human being as he stands before us today, and the extent to which he now possesses wisdom and maturity and stability and all those other positive qualities which too often are acquired only through the very process of painful error.

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The result to date of all these deficiencies in the treatment of the subject of civic loyalty has been the creation of a situation which worries me precisely because it seems to me to play very dangerously into the hands of those men who have constituted themselves our adversaries in the international sphere. As things stand today, I can see no reason why malicious people should have any particular difficulty in rendering unavailable for service to this country almost any person whom they might select for this treatment. All that is necessary is to release a spate of rumors and gossip and demands for investigation. There are always tongues willing and eager to take up this cry and carry it further; something of it is bound to stick in the public mind; and in the end, if the public servant in question is not discouraged and demoralized, a portion of the public will at any rate have lost confidence in him, and his usefulness to the country will have been thereby reduced. Mind you, I am thinking here not only, or even primarily, of the man's own loss, which may be grievous. I am thinking of the country's loss, which is more grievous still. Are we so rich in talented public servants that we can afford to leave the ones we have vulnerable to this sort of danger?

Whether the communists have actually been exploiting this situation to their own advantage, I do not know. I have heard, it seems to me, of their exploiting similar situations in the past, and they are not given to missing opportunities. In any case, I am sure that communist party leaders in Moscow cannot but rejoice at the spectacle, to which they have recently been treated, of bitter disunity and mutual suspicion in our councils over these painful and delicate questions of loyalty. They know well what psychological dangers lie in over-suspiciousness. They know that for the mass as for the individual the preoccupation with possible conspiracy can easily become an escape from a realistic facing up to responsibility, and the beginning of irrational behavior. They know that a community where there is -- let us say -- one undiscovered traitor but where the remaining members are united by bonds of mutual confidence and are going cheerfully and serenely about their business is usually far stronger than a society in which the lone traitor has been found but at the cost of a pervading sense of fear and insecurity throughout the community as a whole. Themselves the cynical manipulators of the forces of fear and suspicion, the communist leaders rejoice when they think they see us becoming the victims of these very forces.

My plea, therefore, is that we move urgently to eliminate this area of vulnerability in our own armor. The way to do this, as it seems to me, is to devise procedures for the handling of these matters which will give society the necessary protection and yet will be proof against malicious misuse and will guard and preserve that most priceless of our governmental possessions: the morale and enthusiasm of the forgotten man -- the loyal civil servant.

I come now to the last of the principles I would recommend for observance in approaching these problems of international communism. It is this: do not be impatient, and do not insist on trying to look too far ahead. Great damage can be done in the field of foreign policy, and precisely in this area of relations with the Soviet Union, by the people who want to achieve swift and mechanical results, and want to know right now what will be the guaranteed outcome of any course of governmental action. The great problems of foreign affairs are part of the problem of nature. Like many natural things, they yield only to correct treatment applied steadily and consistently over a long period of time. Even then, they often yield in ways that are unexpected, could scarcely have been foreseen, and are not always readily recognizable when they come.

Let us not over-rate our infallibility as judges of the results of our own actions in the international field. It is not given to us to see all or to know

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all. I was taught to believe that we began our national life as a generally religious people, concerned to observe the principles of Christian conduct our fathers had bequeathed to us, but content to leave the issue to the vision and wisdom of Divine Providence. We could use, today, in our relations with our self-appointed Soviet adversaries, something of this clear understanding of the delimitations of human responsibility — something of this concentration on the uprightness and dignity of our own conduct, which is indeed ours to control — and something of readiness to leave to the workings of a Divine Will the effect of our strivings on the progress of mankind. It is not always that people are privileged to discern in the phenomena of this life the fruits of their own efforts to do what is right and useful. And it is not always that they would be capable of recognizing them if they could see them. In the great problems of public policy — and this is one of them — then let us abandon the strictures of a nervous secularism; let us not try to take upon ourselves all the burdens of the cosmos; let us leave something to the Divine Judgment in which most of us profess to have confidence.

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